CHAPTER VII

REVIEW

The Bedar raj of Surapur, though founded on an Adilshahi grant in 1665 A.D. grew and expanded on account of the decline of Mughal power in the Deccan. The Deccan misadventure dug Aurangzeb's grave and the Marathas managed to survive and assert their independence. So did the Bedars. It would not have been possible for them to withstand for long the might of the Mughal arms but for inherent weaknesses in Aurangzeb's long-drawn Deccan campaign. Many petty rulers rose to power in the vacuum created by the practical disappearance of Mughal power in the Deccan and Surapur Rajas were amongst them. Small states survive due to the competition among bigger powers to exercise control over them. Neither the Peshwa nor the Nisam, powers that succeeded the Mughals in the Deccan, showed any anxiety to annex the small samsthana, as it was more convenient to levy tribute than to control from a remote centre the Bedars who had proved their spirit of independence. Nor could Surapur be a tributary in the ordinary sense of the term; it paid only when compelled and its right to collect taxes in their regions was respected by the suserains. In the latter half of 18th century the Peshwa did establish a regular tributary relationship but never interfered with its internal autonomy. The samsthana was closer to the Peshwa than to the Nisam. Even its language of administration was Marathi. The samsthana provided a fine illustration of how a martial race could grow into a political body with the aims and
objectives suited to an 18th century state. It would be, perhaps, an exaggeration to say that it was Vijaynagar in miniature, but it does give that impression.

In retrospect it would appear that the growing power of the East India Company was bound to draw into its orbit, as if by gravitational pull, sooner or later, this small samsthan, as happened with all other Indian states, small and big. The 17th article of the Anglo-Nizam treaty of 1800 by which the British promised assistance to the Nizam against Surapur in realizing his dues only provided an occasion. Had this beginning of British connection with the principality been direct it might have proved beneficial to it. No doubt the British would have asserted their paramountcy whenever occasion demanded. But chances were even, considering the principality's past, that it might have not only survived but grown into a model little state, time throwing up some able rajas and divans, as happened in some other Indian states. Lord Wellesley promised aid to a stronger power against a weaker one merely to gain the political advantages of an alliance. Expediency and not justice is the principle of practical politics whatever idealists might think. Wellesley's mistake was in treating Surapur as an exclusive tributary of the Nizam, in so many words in a treaty, even though he was aware that the Peshwa exercised equal suzerainty. Had this aspect been somehow accommodated in the treaty it would have paved the way for direct British intervention, perhaps with such continued benefits of British rule ultimately as were enjoyed in many parts of India.
But that was not to be. Though Wellesley promised aid he had no real intention of providing it. The Nizam took immediate advantage of the treaty by securing Sagar fort and establishing an enclave in the samasthan for non-payment of dues. But there was no further call by the Nizam for British aid till 1828. The British only interfered in 1807-8 to remove the influence on Surapur politics, of Raja Mahipatram who had become anti-British. But after the conquest of the Peshwa in 1818 it was possible for them to assert as successors of the Peshwa their supremacy over Surapur jointly with the Nizam. The opportunity was lost by the indifference of Charles Metcalfe the then British Resident at Hyderabad. An investigation of mutual accounts might have revealed a balance in favour of Surapur. This balance could have been used to pay Surapur's dues to Hyderabad and adjusted in British accounts with the Nizam. Thereby Surapur would have been forever freed of Nizam's control and the British could have exercised it directly whenever occasion arose.

Taking advantage of the succession dispute in 1828 Hyderabad imposed an impossible nazran of 15 lakhs on Raja Krishtappa, and further enhanced the tribute with cruel indifference towards the samasthan's capacity to pay. The dispute had been referred to the Hyderabad Resident as well by Surapur itself. It was possible for the Resident to settle it and make such consequent arrangements as would satisfy all parties concerned. Although the Nizam was described as a faithful ally of the British he was in reality only a subordinate and not an equal ally. It was not too difficult to secure his consent to a just and equitable arrangement. Once again the Resident failed in
his duty. Consequently the Raja was caught in a quagmire of financial difficulties. The samasthan virtually came to be ruled by his bankers or their agents. Successive commanding officers at Matkal on the frontiers of Surapur only helped the Nizam to realize kists though never actually using the troops. They intervened in 1831, 1832, 1837, and from 1839 onwards till Capt. Gresley, the last of them, was deputed for a thorough investigation in December 1841. Earlier officers could have also undertaken the task which would have put a stop to continual extortions by the Nizam at an early stage. One must not exaggerate the incapacity of the Raja or the oppression of the peasantry by banker's agents. Capacity to rule is not a hereditary quality and monarchs born without it should be pitied rather than condemned. The peasantry was spirited enough to resist extraordinary oppression. The really baneful result of the Raja's financial difficulties was that it encouraged intrigues of bankers, irregularity in accounts and inherent tendency of state servants towards private peculation. On top of it the Matkal officers stood British guarantee in writing to the bankers without the knowledge of the authorities. Sooner or later this was bound to bring in serious British intervention. For the time being, however, the Resident chose to wait till Surapur's finances reached a critical point. Till then the treaty obligation of ascertaining the justness of the Nizam's demands was not fulfilled. Meanwhile Minister Chandulal toyed with the idea of sequestering least a part of the state towards payment and setting up Hanamappa, Raja Krishtappa's half brother, obviously to extort nazrana. The Minister's motives
became suspect and for the first time it dawned on the Hyderabad Resident that there was something unjust in Surapur-Hyderabad relations which the British were helping unintentionally. He, however, did not act further. But the Court of Directors must be commended for taking the pax bangla issue into consideration and the Government of India for objecting to such an extreme measure as sequestration.

Resident Fraser deputed Capt. Gresley for full-scale enquiry practically expecting him to propose British management of the samasthan till its dues were liquidated. Gresley had his objections and instead suggested cession of some districts to the Nizam. Gresley was a capable officer as is evinced by his nipping the threatened disturbances by Hanamappa in the bud, his restoration of Surapur property plundered by the Arabs, his perceptive observation, when asked to investigate the sack of Hemnapur that what apparently looked like depredations were in reality enforcement of rightful dues by the Bedars. But his report on Surapur, though ably drawn up in its own way, did not go more deeply into the question why Surapur should ever have paid tribute to the Nizam, and what was a reasonable amount. He argued that Surapur should pay the cost of protection provided by the Nizam through the British which he computed to be Rs. 2 lakhs per annum, equating it with what he considered to be the Nizam's just demands in the past. In 18th century with its better revenues enhanced by its ruin in the Peshwa's and the Nizam's regions, Surapur had never paid such an amount jointly to its subsidiary It also enjoyed the option of evading it when circumstances were favourable. The amounts were arbitrary demands of stronger powers and when these were met Surapur could expect
peace in return. The situation had now changed. But if Surapur could now count upon protection it was on that provided by the British and not by the Nizam. There had not been a single occasion when the Nizam's forces afforded any kind of protection or even assistance to Surapur. On the contrary Nizam-Surapur relations were full of friction. It was possible to so arrange that whatever the amount on account of British protection it should be directly paid to the British without bringing the Nizam into the picture. No doubt there was a treaty obligation towards him. But if a part of it had been so far ignored it was possible to ignore the other part of it now. Alternatively a fresh agreement with the Nizam could have been concluded. The amount itself was unjust in view of the State's dwindling revenues, and when the principality was also spending money on its own armed forces for defence. To demand from the samsthau more than half of its revenue towards protection was certainly not just. Capt. Jackson had suggested wiping off old scores altogether. If the Government of India could later secure the Nizam's consent, however reluctant to writing off so-called peshkash arrears of 5 lakhs it had even now the power to treat all old accounts as cancelled and start with a clean slate. It is pertinent to point out that the Gosain's debts for which British officers themselves had stood guarantee were considerably reduced by the Court of Directors and as it happened never came to be paid at all. The same thorough investigation of accounts as was done in the case of the Gosains, could have been undertaken in respect of Surapur-Hyderabad accounts as well. No doubt this would have taken many years, but it might have revealed that Surapur had already paid more than the stipulated
amounts. Capt. Malcolm's able memo had already given enough indication of Hyderabad's extortions. The investigation of accounts, a treaty obligation, could have been carried out by superior authorities while the samsthan was managed by the British. History is, however, full of 'might-have-beens' and historians wise after the event, can but rue over them.

Once Gresley's settlement was accepted by the Government of India the Resident carried it through with determination. The Raja was practically forced to part with a part of his ancient possessions, an objective which Hyderabad had in mind from 1837 onwards. The question of Andola-Milogi was left hanging in the air. The Raja's sudden death in the first week of August 1842 raised the question of a regent during the minority of young Raja Venkatappa IV. Gresley fell a victim to the machinations of banker Lakshmangir Gosain and his recommendation resulted in the imposition on the state as its diwan, of Pir Naik, Raja Kristappa's brother, in whose ability Gresley himself had no confidence. The rightful regent Rani Ishwaramma who commanded the loyalty of her subjects and her able, honest assistant Chanbasappa were set aside. She defied not Gresley's settlements as is made out by Taylor but the imposition of an incapable diwan. It was quite probable that she and Chanbasappa might have ably ruled the state preventing the later total loss of its independence. Once again we came across that irresistible 'might-have-beens' of history. The Rani's resistance led Gresley to raise the question of the extent of British intervention in the affairs of Indian states. Expediency was the only policy...
adopted by the British so far as Surapur was concerned till then. The Government of India had been merely approving the Resident's proceedings offering temporary solutions. It had been consistent only in preventing extreme, coercive measures which the Resident was eager now to adopt.

Where Gresley failed his successor Taylor succeeded (December 1842). Practically without any instructions from the Resident and without any initial armed assistance he managed to instal Pid Naik in office. Gresley too could have succeeded had he been a little more forceful and had the Resident given him a hint of armed aid later on. For, Taylor's success was as much due to the Rani's wisdom in bowing down to superior force which in fact was employed a little later as to Taylor's tact and determination. The extortion of Rs. 1 lakh from her, the temporary occupation of her jagirs, the confinement of Chanbasappa, form but a fraction of the sad tale of British injustice towards Surapur. But Taylor also cleverly managed to reduce the sibandi and to arrange for some payment to the Nizam. Thereafter he succeeded in associating himself with Surapur administration for the next ten years (1843-1853) of the young Raja's minority. He was thoroughly bored with his military duties. This was a life-time's chance for him to prove his born capacity for civil administration and he brought to bear upon it all his energies and vigour.

Initially he was handicapped by diwan Pid Naik's incapacity and later plagued by intrigues to resist his own authority. He was constantly vexed that he had no full control over expenditure. Anxiety gnawed him when the Government of India strangely decided to remove him in
April 1845 due practically to his honest confession that Gresley and he had been deceived by Lakshmangir Gosain's machinations. He had also lost his dear wife. Nevertheless he applied himself sincerely and with good results to raising the samethan's resources. His position was saved by the commendatory despatch of the Court of Directors and secured by the eventual illness and death of Pid Naik in August 1845. Taylor thereafter became the monarch of all he surveyed. He had initially proposed to carry out a revenue survey and settlement as in the Company's districts. He also believed that this might curb the disputes among Bedars which were mainly over lands and which he was finding it difficult to settle. But realizing that he could not have carried out the measure during his tenure he dropped the idea. The Government of India was also opposed to employing force against possible Bedar resistance to the measure. He, therefore, used the only means at his disposal: personal jamabandi, systematising accounts, regularity in collection and prevention of peculation. Bad seasons marred his results; nevertheless his exertions tended to increase the land revenue. He promoted agriculture by repairing some old tanks and taking up construction of others, encouraging use of better cotton-seed, and cultivation of indigo. He augmented net revenue by auctioning contracts at the highest possible amount, collecting taxes regularly and convincing the Bombay Government that it owed rusuma to Surapur on account of Bagewadi taluq. He had already secured the writing off of Nizam's arrears. His effort to secure a considerable amount from the Company on account of Surapur's traditional rights to collect rusuma in
Bijapur region now under the Company, however, did not succeed, as it was made too late in the day and the Government of India opposed. Similarly his proposal to get back ceded districts was turned down by the Resident. He could not cut down expenditure much as customary state expenses had to be met and there were unexpected contingencies. He could only reduce the salaries of state servants till the crisis was past and systematise treasury accounts. All the same he managed to liquidate the state’s debts and show a surplus yet. Not much money was available for measures of welfare but he did what he could by opening a dispensary, constructing a few small roads that made Surapur easily accessible, planting tamarind trees and mango groves and erecting some public buildings among which the Raja’s new palace was the principal one.

He did not have to do much by way of judicial administration, except establishing a small civil court at Surapur, as panchayats functioned competently and crime itself was infrequent. That also made maintenance of law and order easy. Moreover he could always call upon British troops when he thought that his authority was threatened or the young Raja’s life was endangered. On such occasions he exaggerated the violent nature of the Bedars whom he otherwise found to be honest, peace-loving and always keeping the pledged words. Though they went about with arms whenever necessary he disarmed them figuratively, by taking agreements from them for good behaviour and never once did they disobey him. The only blot on his otherwise excellent administration was his somewhat harsh treatment of the Rani - her banishment, quibbling over her allowances on her return, and opposing her
simple desire for a pilgrimage in old age or her wish to stay away from Surapur. This might be due to the fact that she was the only one in Surapur who had the capacity to replace him. He was severely censured by the Government of India for his misrepresenting the events on 4 February 1848 and the preceding ones as Bedar attempt at insurrection and for wrongly associating the Rani with it resulting in her temporary banishment. He deeply felt the censure, and continued to believe himself to have been right though a Court of Enquiry had disproved him after detailed investigation. Once again Taylor was deceived by mischief-making daftardar, as he was misled by Lakshmangir Gosain earlier. He might have even lost his position on this account but for the continued support of Resident Fraser, the Government of India's own earlier appreciation of his work and the repeated commendation by the Court of Directors.

Viewed in isolation Taylor's first administration of Surapur might fill one with gushing admiration. It might be remembered, however, that there were many other British district administrators in his time who were the real founders of the British empire in India and who brought Great Britain and the Indian people closer than before. He belonged to the best of them. Moreover he was a self-made man. What he really possessed was not training but talent and energy. The glamour of his success in administration somewhat fades when we unravel the close-knit web that is woven on the loom of time and survey at close quarters month by month and week by week, the life and work on which it is based. At the same time it helps us to understand and appreciate a lonely Briton who, amidst a totally alien environment, with no
chance of intellectual intercourse with equals for months together, honestly, sincerely and with all the powers at his command did his best for a small section of Indian society. He not only administered the state but studied its geology, its topography, its history, its records, its people. Whatever little of Surapur's past we know today comes from Taylor. He suffered from very human weaknesses as we all do, he floundered at times; but the manner in which he kept alive his numerous interests despite the burden of official work is an example for all. Even from his official letters and reports, which prove his administrative capacity, he emerges as a warm, engaging personality.

Surprisingly and pleasantly even Resident Fraser, comes to share some of the glow of this personality, by the invariable kindness with which he treated Taylor, his frequent praise of his work which he never failed to convey to the Government of India; his continual support checking Taylor only when really necessary. Otherwise Resident Fraser is seen in this correspondence as one who was unaware of Hyderabad extortions, refused to give much thought to the able memoirs of Captains Malcolm and Jackson, who chose to wait for the Supreme Government's orders than to act quickly, implemented Gresley's report and imposed Pid Naik in a rather highhanded manner, was checked only by the Government of India in taking over Surapur administration immediately, was enthusiastic in coercive measures, crushing the Rani's power or curbing the Bedars whom he repeatedly described as 'barbarous' without the least first-hand knowledge of them, supported Taylor in his harsh treatment of the Rani but pig-headedly and with a peculiar sense of justice opposed the
relinquishment of peshkash arrears by the Hyderabad State for whose administration he had nothing but contempt.

Fraser and Taylor jointly exerted pressure in delaying full transfer of power to Raja Venkatappa IV who, when he came of age, began to exhibit signs of his incapacity for managing the samasthan. A few princes brought up under British care proved to be worthy rulers. Venkatappa was not amongst them. Taylor cannot be said to have neglected the young Raja's education. He arranged for his training, kept him by his side in the durbar initiating him to public business, and transferred a routine part of it as soon as he was 16 or so as an experiment to give him experience. He bought him a coach, horses and camels, built for him a new palace. He might have taken him along during his jamabandi tours which would have been the best training for a young prince; but the Raja's delicate health prevented it. He gave him affection and treated him as a ward for whom he felt responsible. But the best care in the world cannot ensure turning out a capable ruler. The indulgent servants, low companions and his own mother's alleged amour for Kasima - the environment in which he grew up in adolescence must have partly influenced his character and capacity for administration. Taylor proposed a test but did not pursue the idea. Lord Dalhousie firmly ruled that the Raja had a right to his raj. Taylor's, and following him Fraser's, attempt to delay the transfer of full powers remained merely a topic of discussion amongst themselves. Critics of Dalhousie's annexations can see him in a different light in this instance. Dalhousie did not consider the samasthan
important enough to appoint a British political agent at the Company's expense and the Raja, keen on freedom from restraint, refused to have one on his own. The Raja was warned of annexation in the event of maladministration, but he was left alone, despite reports of it by British officers in the adjoining regions. The Resident restricted himself to issuing warnings to the Raja and interfered only to compose his differences with his relations. The Government of India did not consider the subject important enough. The Raja might, perhaps, have improved with age and experience but the events of 1857-8 overtook him. He was misguided enough to engage Arabs for fear of annexation but was otherwise thoroughly unprepared to oppose the British. It is these mercenary Arabs, who obeyed none but their jamadars, were rash enough to cross swords with the British without fear of consequences, and had a history of creating disturbances during the days of the young Raja's father Raja Krishappa, who gave battle to the British. A few daftardars and others the like of whom were notorious for intrigues during Taylor's tenure, were in league with the Arabs who were beyond the Raja's control. Only blind patriotism can make one regard the brief battle at Surapur as a struggle for freedom in the right sense of the word. The Bedars out of their feudal loyalty would have stood by their Raja who, however, surrendered himself at Hyderabad, was tried for rebellion and sentenced to transportation for life, a verdict to be expected from any military court of the turbulent period. A noble but entirely false speech ascribed to him much later by Taylor in his autobiography has naturally been very misleading. The Raja unconsciously provided further material for
superficial sentimentalism by committing suicide. With his death the Bedar raj of Surapur came to an end.

But not the British relations with it. For the first time in the history of their connection with Surapur the Government of India asserted its exclusive claim over Surapur, but so late that it attracted the attention of the Secretary of State, but somewhat unnecessarily as the Nizam had advanced none of his own. The only other occasion when Surapur engaged so much of Government of India's attention was when the Resident resisted surrender by the Nizam of peshkash arrears and they put their foot down directing it firmly, producing in consequence voluminous minutes and incidentally proposing Taylor's removal. Before the assertion of their suzerainty, however, the samasthan had already been held in sequestration and Taylor was called to take charge after a brief military occupation of about 2 months. The soldiers in the British army had indiscriminately sacked Surapur. Taylor curbed to an extent the Prize Committee's cupidity. His main task was to restore law and order and to carry on civil administration as before. The former was not very difficult as the Bedars could be disarmed by agreements and all sections of society by a fiat. Sanction for staff for the latter, severely restricted by the Resident, was long in coming, perhaps indicative of the little importance attached by the Government of India to Surapur. So in the meanwhile Taylor carried on with the Resident's temporary sanction. His additional task in his short second spell was to arrange for allowances to the widowed Ranis, clear off the late Raja's debts and the
arrears of hereditary servants. Executive was not separated from the judiciary and revenue officials were entrusted with judicial work. A curious feature of it was the absence of any directive from the Government of India as to what kind of code was applicable to the sequestered samasthan. It was, perhaps, looked upon as a non-regulation region where administration of justice was greatly dependent on the personal discretion of the executive officers. Stamp duty was not introduced but the introduction of British system of justice in preference to panchayats immediately heralded an increasing volume of litigation in a region earlier marked by an absence of litigious spirit. Taylor introduced the Company's rupee, and set up a couple of schools but public works were meant only for the military. Altogether Taylor's second administration suffers in contrast with his first one. For one thing, the period was too short for any spectacular achievements and secondly Taylor no longer enjoyed the same good health. In any case the Queen's Government of India in disregard of popular feeling shortly gifted away the samasthan to the Nizam as a reward for his services during the Mutiny. In contrast the Court of Directors had expressed a genuine feeling for the welfare of Surapur people.

What was the impact of British relations with Surapur on its people at large? The answer is that direct British rule was too short-lived to leave any permanent impress on the Surapur society. Although the connection formally started in 1800 the British did not have much to do with Surapur till 1828. In the next 13 years they acted more or less as a creditor's agents. They only dealt with the Raja and his bankers. Gresley's little
experience in 1842 did not allow him to have much of an opinion of Surapur and Taylor partly shared it till he assumed full charge. Thereafter he was guided by the Resident's instructions who wrote "It will be desirable that you should proceed with caution in the accomplishment of any changes, however promising and advantageous they may appear, in a country so new to us and our rule as that of Shorapurt; and it will be better that you should gradually feel your way, and watch the success of such changes or modifications as may appear safe and practicable, till you ultimately arrive at the establishment of a simple and equitable system of rule which we may hereafter deliver over to the Rajah with a fair chance of its permanent maintenance, than that we should now try any hasty experiment, of a nature perhaps to excite among the people of the Country, and to leave no permanent or advantageous result on the reversion of the Government to its own Native Chief". Under such a policy directive modernization even if attempted would have been very modest, transition from tradition snail-paced and change superficial. Whether such change to modernity with its competitive life, stresses and strains was in itself desirable is a matter of opinion and preference. For, Surapur society as it emerges from Taylor's writings is almost idyllic, closer to Jean Jacques Rousseau's 'state of nature', a society practically free from crime and litigation, engaged in peaceful occupations mainly agricultural, blissful in its ignorance, leading a simple life bound by time-old customs that suited it and enjoying its traditional festivals. Far from triggering off any
intellectual movement or renaissance, Taylor as directed by the Resident did not even introduce any basic change in existing revenue or judicial structure that could shake the traditional fabric of Surapur society. Nawab Faramuz Jung Bahadur says that Taylor's work was very much "appreciated by the new generation, Brahmin and Saydur alike - for he was beloved by them all who continue to show their gratitude by annually commemorating his name publicly on a certain day set apart for that purpose, and in many a little hamlet the simple folk mention his name at night when lighting their 'kattises'". He tells it as a fact and we may not dispute him. But it is also a fact that apart from mutual affection, which in itself cannot be lightly dismissed, British relations with Surapur hardly left any permanent impression on its society at large. A few brahmans picked up English, the palace ladies were thrilled by boat-rides on Bodhal tank, local gentry admired Taylor's exotic garden and some Surapur citizen availed of western medicines. But in the main Surapur society continued to live in its old, orthodox style hardly hearing any mark of sixty years of connections with the British to which this study is confined. It is possible that a detailed enquiry into Surapur society and administration under the Nizam might reveal a few more changes brought about by the preceding British connection. But it is very unlikely that far reaching changes took place. Competent administrators alone could have consolidated and even improved upon the benefits of British association. Taylor does not appear to have been so fortunate in his successors so that his administration remains a mere memory.
Notes and References:

1. These have been perceptively analysed by Bhimsen Saxena 'Burhanpuri' in Tarikh-e-Dilkusha.

2. Most of the surviving Surapur records, are in Marathi in modi script.

3. Gresley's report, FPC, 8 June 1842, No.167, para 22. "I visited most of the principal villages, and prepared as I was to see ruined houses and waste lands, I was surprised to find that in point of population and extent of agriculture the country is better off than most of the adjoining districts under the Nizam's Government".

4. FPC, 19 April 1841, No. 103.

5. Letters to Reeve, Nos. 2,3,11.

6. Idem, No.31; Story, p. 188.

7. Letter to Reeve, No.91.

8. For instance, Idem, No.16 where Taylor says that Fraser did not know what to do after Gresley sent in his resignation.

9. For instance, the ruler of Chuthe, Black Hills, pp.

10. The Raja returned this affection by offering a jagir which, however, Taylor was not permitted to accept.

11. Letter to Hyd Resdt, 30 April 1855, FPC, 22 June 1855, Nos.77-9.


15. As for example in Mysore, Cubbon's administration was further improved by C.Rangacharlu, Sir Sheshadri Iyer etc. Ain-e-Dakhana e Mys gazetteer compiled in 1834 (p.203), records decline in population of Surapur town to less than 10,000; a couple of middle schools, one of them for girls, a post-office, an English dispensary, were the only improvements.